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SUBJECT: "LHOKA" AKA "SHANNAN": SINIFICATION OF THE CRADLE OF TIBETAN CULTURE, AND DEFENSE OF TIBET FROM INDIA

REF: A) 09 CHENGDU 311; B) 07 CHENGDU 239; C) 09 CHENGDU 280; D) 09 CHENGDU 251; E) 09 CHENGDU 181; F) 09 CHENGDU 252; G) 07 CHENGDU 297; H) 07 CHENGDU 298

CLASSIFIED BY: David E. Brown, Consul General, U.S. Consulate General Chengdu, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (a), (b)

¶1. (C) Introduction and Summary. Although considered the cradle of Tibetan culture, the historical city and prefecture of Lhoka, in southeastern Tibet, is in the midst of a silent cultural and population invasion by Han Chinese, Consul General's November 22-25 visit there suggests. Lhoka's rapid growth is also driven by the need to consolidate political and economic control along China's disputed border with India. The PRC Government, the three designated "Help Tibet" Provinces of Anhui, Hubei, and Hunan, as well as Han businesspersons have all contributed to the construction of a huge, new "China Town" in Lhoka. This has moved the city center away from its traditional "Tibet Town," whose Nge Tse Tsogba monastery was largely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

¶2. (C) Lhoka's infrastructure has improved markedly over the last four years, including wide boulevards and improved telecommunication. Empty buildings and roads, however, raise questions about whether this in part reflects excessive capital investment (as in many other places in China), or the need to strengthen Lhoka as a rear military base should China and India have another border clash. (After the 1962 border war, PRC forces pulled back from a section of Lhoka (aka Shannan) Prefecture, a disputed area that is now the Indian state of Arunchal Pradesh.)

¶3. (C) While local officials estimated the permanent locally registered ethnic Han population at less than four percent, the many migrant workers from Sichuan and other provinces raise the Lhoka city ethnic Han population to about one-quarter of the 50,000 wintertime total, and perhaps 40 percent during the rest of the year, when many migrants arrive to work on construction projects. Photos from the November Lhoka trip are available on the Internet at [tinyurl.com/lhoka-photos](http://tinyurl.com/lhoka-photos). With its political and increasingly economic domination by ethnic Han Chinese, the "sinification" of Lhoka is a microcosm -- on the municipal and prefecture-levels -- of what is happening throughout much of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). End Introduction and Summary. Lhoka's Silent Invasion: Large Han Chinese Influx Leads to "China Town," Marginalization of Traditional "Tibet Town"

¶4. (SBU) Satellite images, like those readily available online from Google maps online (see [tinyurl.com/lhoka-google](http://tinyurl.com/lhoka-google) and zoom in) illustrate how this rapid development has left the "old town" of Lhoka largely untouched. Lhoka is called Shannan in Chinese; the Tibetan and Han parts of the city are adjacent, but

still under the same administration. The new city that we saw has grown considerably from what was visible in the three-year old satellite images currently available on Google maps. Like many other Tibetan towns, Lhoka grew up around a monastery. Only a small part of the huge Nge Tse Tsogpa monastery, leveled to the ground during the Cultural Revolution, was rebuilt. (See photo at [tinyurl.com/lhoka-monastery](http://tinyurl.com/lhoka-monastery).)

15. (SBU) Adjacent to this old part of town, however, the Chinese government has laid out a vast grid of new streets and buildings leading to the other side of the valley. (Note: When visiting the valley where Kings of Tibet were buried in the 9th-11th century, we observed in the distance the town of Chong Gye. This town, like Lhoka, had a Gelug school monastery on the side of the hill, with traditional, Tibetan houses below and around it, running down the hill and into the flat plain. Tibetan Foreign Affairs handlers told ConGenOff that we wouldn't be able to go to this monastery, since "getting there on the road is too difficult." As in Lhoka, the TAR government appeared to be constructing a new "China Town," with modern buildings, away from the "Tibet Town." (See photo at [tinyurl.com/nedong-gelug](http://tinyurl.com/nedong-gelug).) End Note.)

16. (SBU) Few Tibetans were visible on the streets of Lhoka's new, "China Town," -- even the pedicab drivers are Han migrants from Sichuan and elsewhere. We saw a few Tibetan farmers driving their tractors and some weathered Tibetan laborers with their skin wrinkled and darkened by the intense sunlight and UV rays of the high, Tibetan plateau. In fact, all the storekeepers in the central part of "Chinatown" near our hotel were Han Chinese. Many were tending small stalls carrying a minimal amount of food, alcohol, and tobacco products. One shop had a Budweiser sign: "Drink Budweiser to Celebrate the Sixtieth Anniversary of the PRC". All the shop owners claimed to be doing well, although there were few customers when we stopped by in the freezing weather of early November.

17. (SBU) Many of the migrants from neighboring provinces such as Sichuan find the TAR to be a land of opportunity. One shopkeeper from Sichuan said that, by coming to Lhoka, he became his own boss. Across the street next to a small park under construction; a sign promised a modern, functional, non-Tibetan design. To judge by the names of the contractors, all of the construction was being done by Han Chinese construction companies: one each from Shanxi and Chongqing, and two local companies led by people with ethnic Han names. (See photo at [tinyurl.com/lhoka-signs](http://tinyurl.com/lhoka-signs).)

18. (SBU) This river-side park led to "Hunan Street," which had a bridge over a frozen, largely dry river bed. Surreally, the bridge was adorned with 20-foot tall, coconut street lights, complete with plastic palm fronds and fake nuts -- presumably to make "Help Tibet" cadres feel more at home. Much of the assistance that partner provinces provide to areas of the TAR is in effect "tied aid" -- companies from the assisting provinces get contracts and send equipment and personnel to build projects undertaken in their designated areas of the TAR. This assistance is often carried out between corresponding government agencies (duikou guanxi), so that, for example, the education bureau of an assisting province will help of its counterpart in the assisted TAR county. Besides Hunan, two other provinces assign cadres to help Lhoka: Anhui and Hubei -- both of which also have main thoroughfares named in their honor. Consistent with this, we noted signs on new buildings "constructed with the help of the Anhui People's Government."

Two Kinds of Han Bureaucrats:

Shorter-Term "Help Tibet" Cadres, Longer-Term Officials

19. (SBU) Some of the Han cadres assisting in the local government are also from these three provinces. One of the Han Chinese party cadres that we met was Mr. Liu, a Help Tibet (yuanzang) cadre from Hunan Province, the number two with the Lhoka Prefecture Animal Husbandry Bureau (Ref A). Help Tibet cadres, including the Help Tibet cadre from the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (profiled in ref B) who led the TAR FAO and

Lhoka officials shepherding our Chengdu group, typically serve in the TAR for three years. A second Han cadre we met was Li Gencai, a Party Secretary and Deputy Director of the Lhoka Prefecture Religious and Ethnic Affairs Bureau. Mr. Li was not a "Help Tibet" cadre, but instead was from Shandong Province and had lived in Tibet for a couple decades. Many of the Han officials who have lived for decades in the TAR settled there when the PLA assigned their father to the TAR.

¶10. (SBU) The most notable part of our meeting with Mr. Li, who skillfully deflected our questions and told us nothing new, was viewing the ground floor of his office building. There, he and dozens of other party cadres had pinned up, in neat rows on a bulletin board, their lengthy, hand-written essays, all entitled "My Heartfelt Experience in Studying the Viewpoint of Scientific Development" -- a reference to a Hu Jintao's trademark themes. (See photos at [tinyurl.com/lhoka-study](http://tinyurl.com/lhoka-study).)

#### In Lhoka, Han Businessmen Help Themselves

¶11. (SBU) Finally, there are businesspersons from these three "Help Tibet" provinces -- including one likely from Anhui who built the "Wanzhou Commercial Center," one of the largest in Lhoka, and whose name includes the character "Wan" -- the single-character in Chinese meaning Anhui. At an entrance to the commercial center, there was a large, wall-length poster recruiting hair stylists and other workers. Unlike an "Only Han Need Apply" help-wanted sign witnessed that we witnessed in Lhasa during our October visit (Ref C), this poster explicitly stated a policy of no discrimination based on ethnicity. However, the rest of the poster looked like a eugenics experiment with age discrimination: Men and women hired as stylists had to have minimum heights, and minimum and maximum ages. There was also an explicit patriotism test: applicants must "love country and party."

#### Han Cultural Invasion:

##### Speak Chinese and Make the Place Look Like the Rest of China

¶12. (SBU) A second dimension of the Han "invasion" is linguistic and cultural. As in Lhasa, Tibetan children in Lhoka, especially after elementary school, take most of their classes in Chinese. Our three ethnic Tibetan handlers from the FAO (supplemented by two Han males) included the local FAO head, who was a middle-age man; his younger, woman assistant; and a second young woman from FAO Lhasa. None of the three Tibetans could read or write in Tibetan. (Note: Since the mid 1980s, the TAR has sent many elementary school graduates, often the children of Tibetan Party, military, and government officials to study outside the TAR from middle school through university. They return home with native speaker proficiency in Chinese, but poor Tibetan language skills. In summer 2009, Sichuan province started a similar program for its Tibetan areas (ref D). End Note.) (See septel reporting on a Tibetan teacher's views on Tibet efforts to maintain a Tibetan social identity despite widespread and growing education in the Chinese language.) Moreover, unlike "Shangri-La" (formerly Zhongdian in Deqing Prefecture), an ethnic Tibetan tourist town in Yunnan Province (ref E), Lhoka's new town makes no effort to incorporate the colorful, distinctive Tibetan architecture into its new buildings. Lhoka's "Chinatown" is filled with modern, boxy, and ugly buildings.

##### China's Infrastructure Boom (and Overinvestment) Reach Lhoka

¶13. (SBU) According to ConGen Chengdu LES, who visited twice before in 2003-4, there has been a huge improvement in the city's infrastructure in the last five years, including new telecommunication facilities and vastly improved roads. Some of the newly built buildings appear to be nearly empty. Street construction was shoddy, even by Chinese standards. For example, a brand new sidewalk already had many cracked, plasticized tiles, even though the wide street that it paralleled was not even fully completed.

¶14. (C) Comment: One take on Lhoka's construction boom might hold that the central government ordered the provinces to

promote economic growth and raise living standards in their assigned Tibetan prefectures. Lhoka's new, haphazard construction may simply reflect money being poured into the prefecture without well thought out planning. A darker view would be that the PRC government is investing massively in Tibet, not so much to benefit Tibetan people living there, but rather to consolidate its control over this vast territory on its southern border. Development creates economic incentives that are encouraging the migration of Han and other nationalities to the TAR. One additional reason for the buildup is to prepare Lhoka and its greatly improved infrastructure to serve as a rear-base should there be another border clash with India. (Note: Lhoka lies 50 miles SE of Lhasa and 120 miles due north of what has been the line of control between China and India since 1962. The disputed part of Lhoka now under Indian control is also known as the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

#### Tibetans Sweep Lhoka's Memorial to Han War Dead

¶15. (C) While this 1962 border clash may seem like a distant memory, it can be imagined vividly when visiting the large "Shannan Martyrs' Memorial Park" for China's war dead located at the end of "Anhui Boulevard" -- an empty, four-lane street in the central part of Lhoka's new part of town. The cemetery's tombstones, framed by a stony massif that shoots up a thousand feet, did not indicate the years or places of death of its Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers. An ethnic Tibetan told us that the cemetery itself is an insult to the Tibetan people as the PLA soldiers there were not "martyrs," but rather invaders and occupiers who had killed his ancestors. (Photos of the cemetery are at [tinyurl.com/lhoka-cemetery](http://tinyurl.com/lhoka-cemetery).)

¶16. (C) The local government compels ethnic Tibetan students to visit the cemetery and sweep its tombs -- which our source said would be like the Japanese government forcing Chinese students to clean up Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. (Note: According to "Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival," by John Knaus, many of these PLA soldiers died fighting Tibet's resistance fighters. Some of these fighters were trained by the CIA, whose aid reportedly started in the late 50s and ended with the Nixon Administration's opening to the PRC. Assistance reportedly included training of Tibetan fighters in Colorado who returned to Tibet to train others, as well as air drops of supplies into Lhoka Prefecture. End Note.)

#### Lhoka's Boom: Development in a Border Prefecture

¶17. (C) Comment: The city appears to serve as a rear base (houjing) for the PLA should China need to supply its forces in case of a conflict with India. We observed a medium-sized PLA facility on side of the main, two-lane road leading south to the Indian border, some three hours away. Further down the same road, on the opposite side, we observed the construction of a large, new military facility. Locals told us that the road ended at a border checkpoint that was not authorized for official border trade. Nevertheless, they added, local residents continued to carry out "private" (minjian) trade across the border with Nepal and Bhutan, but not across the line of control with India.

¶18. (C) The PAP presence in downtown Lhoka was not as obvious as it was in October in Lhasa near, for example, the Potala Palace and Jokhang Temple (Ref F). Yet, there were other telltale signs. Some telephone lines had signs posted in Chinese that they belonged to the PLA -- perhaps to deter thieves. Many of the streets were made with thick cement that could support the weight of tanks. There were "Built Jointly by the Military and the People" (junmin gongjian) signs on the outside of several buildings. This slogan was created by Deng Xiaoping in 1980s to mean "joint army-civilian efforts to promote socialist ethics and culture." This same sign can be seen elsewhere in China, most notably in buildings in post-earthquake Sichuan. This sort of sign suggests a significant military presence. End Note.)

#### Return to Lhoka's Old Town -

#### Monastery at Center Stage Reflects Traditional Tibetan Town

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¶19. (C) After our lunchtime visit to the cemetery, still free of the Tibetan Foreign Affairs Office, we also headed off to a walking tour of Lhoka's old "Tibet Town." As in a traditional Tibetan town, Lhoka's Nge Tse Tsogpa monastery had been the town's focal point, built a hill side and flowing into the valley's flatland. At the monastery, we found three monks, each over 30 years old. One of the three monks told us that, before 1950, there used to be 300 monks - 100 times the current number.

This monk showed us a picture ([tinyurl.com/lhoka-monastery](http://tinyurl.com/lhoka-monastery)) of the monastery before it was destroyed; it was huge, perhaps 10 times its current size, and occupied much of the hillside above its current location.

¶20. (C) We also visited a second, smaller monastery, Bengtsang, also in Tibet Town. One monk there told us that he had become a monk several years earlier, as a child, but that only last year, when he turned 18, had he gain official government recognition of his profession. This monk said he had been subject to intense, often daily, political education by the Government's Religious Affairs Bureau following the March 2008 uprising in Tibet; in 2009, however, political education had fallen sharply to only 1-2 times per month. The monastery, like any location at which religious worship is officially permitted, posts a registration certificate as a religious activities venue. (See photo of certificate at [tinyurl.com/monastery-reg](http://tinyurl.com/monastery-reg).)

¶21. (C) As we strolled around "Tibet Town," part of which is known as "Naidong" in Chinese, we saw other signs of government control. In one compound, we passed by as PLA soldiers emerged from the inside. We saw signs for the "Naidong Community Residents Committee," and the "Naidong Community (Communist) Party Branch." On some houses, plaques over the door wells boasted that the home had been recognized as "Peaceful Homes" (ping'anhu) by the Prefecture's Comprehensive Management Committee (xianzongzhiwei), or as "Cultured Homes" (wenminghu) by the Party Branch of Naidong Residents' Committee. (See photos at [tinyurl.com/lhoka-plaque](http://tinyurl.com/lhoka-plaque).) One ethnic Tibetan explained that the Communist Party had made, since around 2000, a conscious effort to recruit wealthier, entrepreneurial Tibetans into its ranks. The better maintained, more prosperous homes with these plaques were often inhabited by these Tibetan Party members, he explained. We also observed a sign for the PRC Commerce Ministry's nationwide "Ten Thousand Villages, 1000 Townships Market" construction program (wancun qianxiang shi), which helps shopkeepers in smaller towns to start businesses.

Lhoka and Lhasa Population: Migrants Not Included

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¶22. (C) Comment: The populations of Lhasa and Lhoka include both a permanent population of people registered locally, which are used in the published population counts, plus a poorly understood floating population of migrants, soldiers, tourists and businesspeople. Even to the extent to which the size of the floating population is understood (public security and family planning authorities try to keep track of migrants), release of this politically sensitive information is controlled. Some estimates of the floating population in different areas appear in Chinese scholarly articles available through the enormous scholarly article database at [cnki.net](http://cnki.net). Different Chinese government offices such as family planning and public security have different population counts. The migrant population swells in the summer, and shrinks during the winter months (refs G and H).

¶23. (SBU) Our FAO handlers were uncertain about Lhoka's total population, but estimated it to be 96 percent ethnic Tibetan (and the large majority of the remaining four percent Han Chinese). We estimate Lhoka's minimum population to be about 50,000, with 25 percent Han Chinese during the winter months, and 40 percent Han during the rest of the year, when the Han "liudong renkou" (floating population) works on many infrastructure and construction projects. While in Lhoka, we



met an ethnic Han taxi driver whose family was from Jiangsu province, although he had actually been born and grew up in Tibet. This Han likely has a permanent household registration in Tibet. By contrast, when we visited the Bangso Marpo Temple, Han workers repairing a road to it told us that they were from Sichuan Province, and just temporarily in Tibet doing construction work.

¶24. (SBU) Official statistic released in 2008 indicated that Lhasa's population at the end of 2007 was 622,316 of which long-term residents numbered 464,736, and "temporary residents" (zhanzhu renkou) were 157,580. Of the permanent residents, 88.9 percent, or 413,077 were Tibetans, and 10.5 percent, or 48,760, were Han Chinese. China's last national census was conducted in 2000, with statistical sampling since then to estimate newer, yearly figures. The TAR's population in 2008, as estimated in the "2009 China Statistical Yearbook" at 2.87 million, of which 650,000 was urban and 2.22 million rural. The population of the TAR with long-term residents was estimated at 2.576 million, which would suggest that the population living in the TAR with residency in other provinces is about 294,000. The statistics are unclear, however, because a separate breakdown in the statistics says that there are only 17,000 people in the TAR with permanent registrations elsewhere.

¶25. (SBU) We estimate Lhasa's population at 700,000 of which about 40 percent are Han, including long-term Han residents and the "liudong renkou" (transient population) of shorter-term, mostly Han laborers. In October 2009, Consulate visited a new district in Lhasa under construction; according to news reports, it will house 100,000 residents, the large majority of whom we expect to be Han. One need only visit Lhasa's newly expanding areas where ethnic Han live, and compare it to "Tibet Town" around the Barkhor to see how the ethnic Han-to-Tibetan ratio is increasing.

BROWN